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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR STRENGTHENS U.S.-PHILIPPINE TIES DURING ALBAY VISIT

¶1. SUMMARY. During an April 28 visit to Albay province, the Ambassador reaffirmed the importance of the U.S.-Philippine bilateral military partnership where she dedicated a 3.2 kilometer road improvement project completed by a team of U.S. and Philippine military members during the annual Balikatan activities. She was accompanied on the trip by the joint commanders of Balikatan 2009, U.S. Brigadier General Ronald Bailey (USMC) and Commodore Ramon Espera, Jr., of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The trip included a visit to a medical civic action project (MEDCAP) highlighting the humanitarian assistance provided by the joint U.S. and Philippine military forces during Balikatan. The Ambassador also visited a Disaster Preparedness Summer Camp sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that showcased the training received by local primary school teachers and children to prepare for natural disasters. Large crowds of local residents and the local government officials present warmly welcomed the Ambassador at all the events. The Ambassador also met with members of the U.S. Armed Forces participating in the Balikatan exercise in the Bicol region. Through a live radio interview, she spoke directly to residents of Albay province about Balikatan 2009 and the ongoing U.S. government assistance to the region. END SUMMARY.

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BALIKATAN: MILITARY TRAINING AND HUMANITARIAN CIVIC ASSISTANCE  
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¶2. Balikatan, an annual bilateral military training event that includes numerous humanitarian civic assistance projects, allows U.S. and Philippine armed forces to work, train, and provide assistance together to the greatest possible number of people in need. Improving the ability of U.S. and Philippine forces to work together as one team on joint projects is one of the many benefits of Balikatan. The emphasis for Balikatan 2009 was humanitarian assistance to several communities in the Bicol region. This assistance included 28 humanitarian projects with direct costs of \$428,000 for materials, medication, and supplies. Of these 28 projects, 22 were medical and dental missions and six were engineering projects including water-wells, two-room school houses, and road projects. The medical missions treated more than 21,000 patients. Treatments consisted of general medicine, pediatrics, optometry, dentistry, and veterinary services. No military exercises were conducted in the Bicol region during Balikatan 2009.

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NEW ROAD DEDICATION SHOWS STRONG PARTNERSHIP  
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¶3. At a ceremony in Pio Duran to dedicate the completion of a 3.2 kilometer road project, the Ambassador emphasized the value of the U.S.-Philippine bilateral military partnership for humanitarian assistance and training. The project succeeded in linking two road sections together to create a 50 kilometer stretch of road. A combined team of 56 U.S. and Philippine service members worked together to complete the road improvements, with expenditures of \$103,000 on construction supplies. The road now connects two local communities, allowing students easier access to their school and farmers easier transport of their products to the port in Pio Duran. The importance of the event for bilateral relations was evidenced by the number of distinguished Filipino visitors, including the

Secretary of National Defense, a congressman, and two governors. The Ambassador stressed in her remarks that the United States and the Philippines have been friends and allies for a long time, and that they will continue to work together to not only make the world safer, but also to provide a peaceful, prosperous future.

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MEDCAP EVENT PROVIDES HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE  
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¶4. The Ambassador visited with the U.S. and Philippine 40-member medical assistance team in Malipo that was providing free medical treatment to the local communities. The MEDCAP served an area with over 10,000 people spread out over six surrounding communities. This entire area normally is only served by a single medical clinic with only one physician and a health worker. Pharmaceuticals and medical supplies worth \$5,000 were allocated for this mission. The medical team included family practice physicians, radiologists, pediatricians, optometrists, dentists, pharmacists, and veterinarians. Over 1200 patients were served during this one-day mission.

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS SUMMER CAMP SHOWCASES VITAL USAID TRAINING  
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¶5. The Ambassador attended a Disaster Preparedness Summer Camp for primary school children and teachers in Guinobatan Municipality. This three-day camp, sponsored by USAID and implemented through Save the Children, is part of a two-year project that provides disaster preparedness activities, as well as non-food items, food security, and livelihood support to people affected by Typhoon Reming (international name Durian) that struck the Bicol region in November

¶2006. The ongoing project trains teachers on disaster preparedness who then incorporate this training into their classroom activities. The students presented a "disaster preparedness dance," and the Ambassador participated in a disaster drill involving not only the teachers and students, but also a municipal emergency response team. The Ambassador expressed admiration for the efficient drill response and gave her enthusiastic support for this life-saving training.

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MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES  
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¶6. The Ambassador addressed media at the Pio Duran, Malipo and Guinobatan events. She emphasized the close historical relationship between the United States and the Bicol region and highlighted the Balikatan and USAID humanitarian projects that have taken place in the region. She stressed that joint U.S. and Philippine humanitarian assistance and training activities lead to improved cooperation, coordination, and goodwill. Through a live radio interview in Legazpi City, the Ambassador, together with U.S. Brigadier General Ronald Bailey and Commodore Ramon Espera of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, reached a regional audience with a positive message of sustained partnership. The Ambassador emphasized the extensive benefits provided by the annual humanitarian missions of Balikatan and sustained U.S government assistance in the region through USAID and the Peace Corps. The Ambassador stressed that the United States is proud to work together with our Philippine partners, not only during Balikatan but throughout the year, to improve the lives of the people of Bicol.

KENNEY